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Seventy-third year

Provisional

8390th meeting

Monday, 5 November 2018, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 29 October 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/917)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 29 October 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/971)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/971, which contains the text of a letter dated 29 October 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I thank the members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief the Council again on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on this matter. I spoke to the OPCW Director-General this past Thursday, 1 November, and look forward to seeing him in two weeks, when I travel to The Hague to deliver a message on behalf of the Secretary-General at the opening of the Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

There have been some new developments related to this file in the past month; in other areas there has been little change. Efforts to clarify the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic remain as I previously informed. Following the analysis by the OPCW of the information provided to it by Syria on 10 July, the Director-General wrote a letter to the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, dated 28 September, which reiterated the need to resolve the outstanding issues and invited Syria to continue working to clarify the remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies. That message was underlined at working-level meetings that took place between the OPCW and the Syrian National Authority.

In that context, I welcome the Director-General's news that the inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities are now under way. The conduct of the inspections is in accordance with the decision of the OPCW Executive Council taken at its eighty-third session, which required the OPCW to carry out two yearly inspections of those sites.

With regard to the OPCW Fact-finding Mission (FFM) in the Syrian Arab Republic and its work in relation to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, the Director-General informed me that the FFM is close to drawing its conclusions and will be issuing the report in due course. Like the Council, I look forward to receiving the final report on that incident.

The FFM is also investigating five additional reported incidents brought to the attention of the Director-General by the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic: two incidents in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017; one incident in Al-Salamiyah on 9 August 2017; one incident in Yarmouk, Damascus, on 22 October 2017; and one in Souran on 8 November 2017. So far there is no indication of when a report on those incidents is likely to be issued.

At its fourth special session, in June, the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention decided, among other things, that the OPCW Secretariat

> "shall put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic ... in those instances in which the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in Syria determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, and cases for which the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has not issued a report".

The OPCW Director-General has now provided two progress reports in that regard to the OPCW's Executive Council and to the Secretary-General. He continues to make progress in implementing his mandate.

Although five years have now passed since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), there is still work to be done before it can be considered to have been fully implemented. Moreover, as long as the use of chemical weapons is ongoing or the threat of their use lingers, we must retain our focus on the issue and not allow ourselves to become inured to it. We will need unity in the Security Council if we are to collectively re-establish the norm against chemical weapons. The vitality and credibility of the broader disarmament and non-proliferation architecture depend on it. The use of these weapons must always be seen as a violation of a deeply held taboo. It is therefore imperative to identify those responsible and hold them accountable.

In a related matter, and before concluding, I want to note that allegations of a possible planned use of chemical weapons in Idlib continue to surface. The Secretary-General has made clear his concern about the continued use of chemical weapons, as well as the risks of a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of a full-scale military operation in Idlib province. He has called on all parties to exercise restraint. I want to once again underscore the vital importance of upholding humanitarian principles and the Chemical Weapons Convention in Syria.

The President: I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The United States is pleased that the agreement to establish a demilitarized zone in and around Idlib continues to hold. We again note that any military offensive in Idlib would be a reckless escalation that would bring further instability.

The United States is standing with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to support his effort to make progress towards a durable political solution as the best chance of forestalling additional episodes in which the Al-Assad regime might again consider using chemical weapons. The Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, independently confirmed by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, is a clear demonstration of why the United Nations-led political process must move, make progress and succeed without further delay. The regime used deadly chemical weapons on its own people. There must be accountability for that, and there must be a political transition, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that ensures justice and prevents anyone, particularly the Al-Assad regime, from using chemical weapons again.

There must be an end to the provocations and disinformation from the Al-Assad regime and Russia, including their continued attempts to falsely accuse humanitarian first responders and heroes — the White Helmets — of planning chemical-weapon attacks in Idlib or elsewhere. This is especially ridiculous considering that independent mechanisms created by this very Council have found the Syrian regime to be the party responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The United States once again expresses its strong support for the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in its work of investigating allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We strongly support the implementation of the OPCW's attribution arrangements for cases where the Fact-finding Mission has determined that use or likely use has occurred. Attribution for the use of chemical weapons in Syria is one of the steps necessary for accountability and preventing future use. The United States continues to hope that the Council will unite around the notion, which was thought to have been well established and accepted for 100 years, that chemical weapons have no place in our world. All of us, and particularly the Syrian people, deserve to live without fear of those horrific weapons.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

For a long time now, some Western States have made Syria's so-called chemical dossier, which the Security Council considers every month, into a tool for putting pressure on the authorities in Damascus — a tool that destroys the foundations of international cooperation in the area of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Syria's chemical-weapon stockpiles were removed and eliminated under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The former military-chemical programme's facilities have

been destroyed. Inspections of the scientific research centre have revealed no undeclared activities, and after the missile strikes on the installations by the United States and its allies any inspection activities would be pointless.

The subject of Syria's initial declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has become particularly ritualized. For all these years, the Syrian Government has conscientiously cooperated with the OPCW Technical Secretariat. It has provided all the information it possesses, but the number of so-called unresolved issues is only increasing. Damascus has reached a point where it has no more data. Any possibility of shedding light on a host of issues has gone, but they have been artificially kept on the agenda.

The investigations conducted by the former OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) have gone down in history as blatantly unprofessional and outrageously politicized. They were artificially directed at one goal, tarnishing the international reputation of the Syrian authorities. Our attempts to bring the JIM's work into alignment with CWC standards were firmly blocked. The logical outcome of those manipulations was the closure of the Mechanism. I should add that we have yet to hear a reasonable explanation from the Secretariat about how effectively the principles of the confidentiality and inviolability of the former JIM's archives are being ensured, as established in the scope of its authority. We have had information that there have been unacceptable leaks of sensitive data, which must stop immediately.

So far we have not been able to change the parameters of the operations of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, which prefers to work remotely and base its research on dubious sources that are known to be hostile to the Syrian authorities. Attempts to reform the Mission in accordance with the provisions of the CWC have been met with stiff resistance from those whom this state of affairs suits.

Meanwhile, Damascus's opponents continue to design new structures, needless to say according to their own rules, as a result of which the OPCW has lately been literally bursting at the seams. In June, a decision by an absolute minority vote of the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention was pushed through assigning to the organization in The Hague the job of determining those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. The decision is illegitimate, because it contradicts the letter and spirit of the CWC and would require substantial amendments to the text of the Convention that would require the consent of all member States. Besides that, it is a blatant infringement on the Security Council's exclusive prerogatives.

The people behind that initiative are now attempting to extract budget funds for implementing the attribution resolution and tailoring the OPCW's programme of work for the coming year accordingly. That is being done with violations of the rules of procedure and severe pressure being put on the parties to the CWC. The OPCW, which began as an effective mechanism for international control in the area of chemical disarmament, is losing its authority and becoming an instrument for putting political pressure on undesirable countries.

Against that backdrop, we continue to receive alarming information that terrorist groups in Syria are pursuing their preparations for large-scale provocations through the use of toxic substances, in cooperation with the White Helmets. Our Syrian colleagues regularly bring indications of this to the Council's attention and the Russian military also has information on it. For example, we know that on 27 October, militias from the Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria transferred 20 decalitre containers of chlorine from Maarrat Al-Nu'man. Local residents reported to the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic that White Helmet activists were looking for people willing to take part in filming staged video footage in exchange for food. We have received similar information from Aleppo province, where the White Helmets brought canisters of toxic substances and professional video-recording equipment to the towns of Azaz, Marea and Al-Rai. Those provocations are clearly designed to pin a label on the violator of the non-proliferation regime in Syria, create a reason for renewed acts of aggression against Damascus and hold Russia up to shame as an alleged enabler of the "heinous crimes of the regime". Our military experts are monitoring the situation. We have radiation, chemical and biological reconnaissance vehicles deployed at posts in the immediate vicinity of the demilitarized zone in Idlib province that will help us analyse the situation.

The negative side of the politicization of the topic of Syria's former chemical warfare programme is the lack of an adequate response to the genuine threat of chemical terrorism in Syria and the Middle East. The initiatives that Russia has launched in that regard are

being deliberately obstructed. However, we hope that life will compel an end to such unconstructive approaches.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this meeting, as well as Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu for her very informative briefing. Today I will discuss three points — the situation on the ground, the importance of remaining mobilized in the face of the re-emergence of chemical weapons and the problem of Syrian chemical weapons in particular.

On the ground, our priority is maintaining a long-term ceasefire in Idlib. The Istanbul summit on 27 October resulted in a clear commitment by the four participants to support the sustainable implementation of the ceasefire in Idlib. The idea is removing for the long term the threat of a major offensive that would have disastrous humanitarian, migratory and security consequences. The summit's road map is therefore clear and we will continue to support the ongoing efforts to stabilize the situation and enable Turkey to separate terrorists from other groups. We must also do everything we can to ensure the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as to ensure comprehensive, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Syria by the most direct routes and in the most effective way.

The Istanbul communiqué also outlines our collective demand that any use of chemical weapons be banned. To cite its very clear message, the summit's participants

(*spoke in English*)

> "[r]eaffirmed their strongest opposition to the use of chemical weapons by any party in Syria and called for strict compliance by all parties with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction".

(*spoke in French*)

While the regime has continued its deceitful propaganda campaign of blaming others for the chemical attacks, I should emphasize the importance of maintaining our extreme vigilance with regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Any resort to such weapons will not go unanswered.

As President Macron hosts a ceremony in France a few days from now marking the 100th anniversary of the armistice of 11 November 1918, we must be able to assume our collective responsibility to history by ensuring that the barbaric use of chemical weapons that occurred during the First World War, so deeply etched in our collective memory, is never repeated. In view of the re-emergence of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere, a united and mobilized Security Council is therefore an absolute necessity. The decision of the States parties to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), adopted in June in accordance with the rules of the Organization, has enabled the international community to strengthen its capabilities, providing it with improved tools for deterring the use of chemical weapons and in particular aimed at designating its perpetrators more effectively. It is now necessary to translate that decision into the Organization's means, especially with regard to the upcoming deadlines this month in The Hague.

We should make it clear that failing to invest in strengthening the existing institutions would jeopardize the non-proliferation regime, which is at the heart of our collective security, and at a time when that regime, with its highly developed chemical-weapon component, is being put to the test. That is a scenario that we cannot allow to happen. In particular, we call on everyone to support all investigative mechanisms established in The Hague, Geneva and New York in the difficult task that lies ahead. That is the goal of the initiatives that we have put forward, from the partnership in the fight against impunity for the use of chemical weapons to the establishment of a European Union sanctions regime. For that reason, we also support strengthening the OPCW's verification and inspection capabilities.

My third point is that strengthening those verification measures is all the more necessary in view of the continuing uncertain state of Syrian stockpiles. The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria confirms the existence of chlorine and sarin stockpiles, and yet there there has been little progress for months on Syria's initial declaration of its stocks in 2013, which is still full of inconsistencies. That à la carte approach by the Syrian regime is not acceptable and demands our collective vigilance. It is essential that the regime's supporters get it to cooperate fully.

In conclusion, with regard to the broader Syrian conflict, the threat of the use of chemical weapons and the country's instability will not end as long as the regime refuses to engage with Staffan de Mistura's political process, whose framework was established in

resolution 2254 (2015). The Istanbul communiqué also establishes a clear goal with regard to that, a meeting of a constitutional committee by the end of the year. Together with the members of the small group on Syria, France will spare no effort in that regard. The United Nations has established a third list, which it has reviewed in dialogue with all stakeholders on several occasions. All conditions have been met so that the United Nations can convene a constitutional committee and finally implement the entirety of resolution 2254 (2015), which serves as our common guiding light now more than ever, in particular with regard to the holding of free and fair elections under the supervision of the United Nations in a safe and neutral environment. That is the only way to reach a lasting solution to the conflict.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing today and for submitting the sixty-first monthly report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to the security Council pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013).

As we begin the month of November, allow me to start by reminding the Security Council that this month last year the Council had the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism at its disposal, which was able to identify in a professional, objective and independent manner those who used chemical weapons in Syria. For some time, the Syrian chemical dossier counted as one of the Security Council's most prominent successes. Through its unity, the Council was able to underline the international community's determination and resolve to ensure the non-recurrence of chemical-weapon crimes and ensure accountability. One year after the end of the Mechanism's mandate, we find ourselves unable to agree on a new mechanism and compelled to resort to means outside the purview of the Security Council so as to administer justice and ensure accountability relating to chemical-weapons crimes.

The State of Kuwait therefore supported the French initiative to ensure accountability for those who used chemical weapons and supported numerous countries to hold a special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the OPCW on 26 and 27 June in The Hague. The Conference sought to identify parties responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria through the OPCW. That was a very important step supported by the State of Kuwait. We look forward to seeing the OPCW adopt the necessary measures to shoulder that responsibility. At the same time, we stress that the Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations to counter all threats to international peace and security, including crimes involving chemical weapons.

Once again, we restate our readiness to work with all members of the Security Council to reach an agreement on establishing a new mechanism to shoulder our common responsibilities. We call again for the need for Council's members to speak as one voice on this issue, which involves is the crime of using those prohibited weapons. We reiterate that the lack of a mechanism to hold accountable those who used chemical weapons in Syria will allow them to enjoy impunity and fail to ensure that they will be held accountable in the future. On the other hand, we look forward to the final findings of the investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma on 7 April. We renew our support for the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to uncover the truth.

We share the Secretary-General's disappointment over about continued inconsistencies in the Syrian Government's declaration concerning its chemical-weapons programme. Once again, we call on the Syrian authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW and provide it with the required information to end the discrepancies regarding the details of its chemical programmes.

In conclusion, we reiterate our firm and principled position condemning the use of chemical weapons anywhere, anytime and by any party. We underscore the need to hold accountable the perpetrators of those crimes, whether individuals, entities, non-State groups or Governments. We once again emphasize that there is no military solution to the crisis in Syria. The only solution is a political one in accordance with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Chinese presidency for convening this meeting. My delegation also thanks Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her comprehensive briefing on the issue of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, my country commends Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the

Secretary-General, for his tireless efforts with regard to the Syrian issue.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the Syrian authorities' cooperation with the relevant bodies of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which led to the destruction of 27 chemical-weapon production facilities declared by Damascus. In that regard, my country commends the Syrian Arab Republic for its efforts and encourages it to cooperate further with a view to addressing the concerns raised by the OPCW in the report to the Secretary-General (S/2018/971, annex). Côte d'Ivoire also notes with satisfaction the visit made by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in September to collect additional information and conduct interviews concerning the 2017 incidents, including in Kharbit Masasnah; Qalib Al-Thawr, in Al-Salamiyah; Yarmouk, in Damascus, and Al-Balil, in Souran. My delegation would like to see the analysis of the data collected by the Fact-finding Mission help identify those who used chemical weapons in the areas just mentioned with a view to bringing them before the competent courts.

My country welcomed the 17 September signing by the Russian Federation and Turkey of the agreement establishing a demilitarized zone in Idlib governorate. That agreement helped to prevent the much-feared armed confrontation among the warring parties, thereby avoiding the risk of the use of chemical weapons and of a humanitarian catastrophe. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges all parties to play a decisive role in the implementation of the provisions of that agreement, particularly those relating to the withdrawal of heavy weapons and combatants from the demilitarized zone.

The steadfast position of Côte d'Ivoire is that the use of chemical weapons, both in times of war and peace, constitutes a grave human rights violation regardless of who uses them. The Council therefore has the imperative duty to respond collectively and firmly to those reprehensible acts, together as one. It is therefore regrettable that the institutional vacuum resulting from the failure to renew the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in November 2017 is responsible for the inability to determine the facts concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria and to bring the perpetrators before the competent international tribunals. My country therefore welcomed the mandate conferred upon the OPCW at the fourth special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, held from 26 to 27 June 2018 in The Hague, thereby enabling it to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of chemical-weapon attacks.

Côte d'Ivoire stresses once again that the use of chemical weapons, whatever the circumstances, remains unacceptable both in terms of international law and the values that make up our collective conscience.

In conclusion, my country calls on the parties to the conflict in Syria to prioritize finding a political settlement to the current crisis through inclusive dialogue and in accordance with the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and express our thanks to Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu and her team for her informative briefing. We reaffirm the support of the Government of Equatorial Guinea for the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), whose personnel operate in very sensitive and risky conditions.

We reiterate that the complete destruction of the 27 chemical-weapons production facilities declared by Syria is an important development that reflects the will and commitment on the part of national officials of the Syrian Arab Republic and of international parties, above all the Russian Federation, to take resolute steps towards the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). It also aims to achieve the objectives of the original declaration on the Syrian Government's chemical-weapons programme. In that regard, we continue to commend the close cooperation between the OPCW and Damascus in order to clarify any discrepancies or inconsistencies that might have been observed in the original declaration and in the information exchanged in compliance with the obligations provided for in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea takes note that the Fact-finding Mission has not yet reached conclusions with respect to the events of 7 April in Douma. However, we endorse the idea that further investigation into the indicent should be carried out with rigour and professionalism, as well as the other five incidents reported to the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

With respect to the safety of OPCW personnel at investigation and inspection sites, our Government believes access to the sites of alleged incidents requires that the security of the mission be ensured on

a permanent basis in accordance with the provisions of the Conference of the States Parties held on 26 and 27 June. In that regard, we reiterate the need for the Technical Secretariat to implement the new measures aimed at mitigating high-security risks proposed by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. That would lead to better planning on the upcoming inspections planned at the Barzah and Jamraya facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre.

We must remember that we are talking about the most effective, cheapest and easiest type of weapon available — certainly more so than nuclear weapons — and we must therefore prevent warring parties from using this weapon again in Idlib or any part of Syria at all costs. The demilitarization agreement on Idlib, which has brought about relative stability to the area, should make it impossible for chemical attacks to re-emerge.

Let us not be deceived. Opposing positions in the Security Council show that the end of chemical weapons in Syria effectively depends on a political agreement. In that context, the Security Council and the OPCW are the main channels for addressing this thorny problem. We recognize the important role they have been playing and we hope that the parties concerned will adopt a constructive approach to find a solution through direct and unhindered dialogue, which can make it possible to prevent and put a definitive end to any further use of chemical weapons in Syria by any party that intends to use them.

In that regard, we continue to emphasize the need for the establishment of a mechanism for attribution of responsibility, which would be essential in reaffirming the prohibition of the use of those weapons and to deter their use. We also welcome the decision of the Conference of the States Parties urging the Technical Secretariat to take steps in identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is a step in the right direction, as we firmly believe that it is the common responsibility of the entire international community to uphold the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons and prevent those abominable attacks from being repeated and by ensuring that no one can be exonerated from responsibility in the event of those situations.

I conclude by reiterating the official position of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea: we oppose the production, trade, distribution, storage and use of chemical weapons by anyone and anywhere.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): As this is the first time I take the floor during this month, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I also thank Bolivia for its presidency of the Council last month.

I would like to thank the High Representative for her briefing. I think that it is clear that not enough progress has been made. At one level that is not a surprise, given the track record of the Syrian authorities. But at another level it just beggars belief: chemical weapons are universally prohibited weapons under international law. Everybody on the Council, except one member, stresses that and stresses the supreme importance of upholding that prohibition. I think that the interventions by Kuwait and France laid out very well the historical place that chemical weapons hold in global non-proliferation regimes.

What part of "these are prohibited weapons" do Syria and Russia not understand? I think it is almost absurd that we should have to rehearse each month quite how terrible those weapons are. It really ought to be globally recognized and upheld that we work to strengthen the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Chemical Weapons Convention and to make sure those weapons are never used. That ought to be a universal good that everybody in the United Nations ought to be able to subscribe to. Future generations will judge us very harshly — but will judge two countries particularly harshly — for breaking that prohibition. As many speakers have said, the OPCW is doing good work. It is mandated to do that work. And the Conference of States Parties have decided to strengthen the work that it does.

There was an alternative — to have a Security Council mechanism — but that came to a grinding halt with a Russian veto. Therefore, we must all support the OPCW Director-General and his work to implement the decision adopted at the special conference of the States Parties held in June. For our part, the United Kingdom looks forward to arrangements being swiftly put in place so that the OPCW can begin its work on attribution of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria.

We call on all States that will be meeting in The Hague later this month to respect the decision, which was taken by an overwhelming majority in June. We look to all international partners to engage constructively in

discussions on the future work of the organization in Syria and elsewhere. On the funding point, it is in all our countries' interests for the OPCW to receive the funding it needs to continue to uphold the global norms against chemical weapons.

On other issues, I just want to endorse what others have said about the importance of the political settlement and of establishing the constitutional committee in line with the Istanbul summit declaration, which we very much welcomed at the time. And of course, on Idlib, we want that agreement to hold. It is the key to so much about the future of the people in Syria.

I want to conclude by addressing the allegations about the White Helmets. We keep hearing those allegations. Again, it beggars belief that we should have to take the floor to defend some of the bravest volunteers working in Syria. The Syrian civil defence have confirmed that none of their volunteers were involved, let alone killed, in the alleged incident referred to by the Syrian authorities in their recent correspondence, which is contrary to those authorities' fabrications.

Repeated allegations that the United Kingdom and its allies are preparing a chemical-weapons attack are malicious, absurd and they are simply an attempt to distract and deflect attention from the real situation on the ground in Syria. But I want to end by echoing what the representative of France said, that we will respond appropriately if there is a chemical-weapons attack. And that attack will not come from us.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. We also thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her important briefing.

We note with deep concern the growing number of allegations of the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population in the Syrian Arab Republic. Peru condemns those atrocious acts wherever they occur and considers them to be in open defiance of the non-proliferation regime and the maintenance of international peace and security. We are also concerned about the continued discrepancies, errors and omissions in the Syrian declaration. The recent information provided by the Government of Syria to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was once again insufficient. We reiterate that the Syrian authorities are legally and morally obligated to cooperate fully in order to clarify the remaining discrepancies and that the Council is responsible for safeguarding the non-proliferation regime.

Moreover, we wish to reaffirm our confidence in the work being carried out by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission, whose professionalism and technical rigour have made it possible to determine that chemical attacks have occurred in Syria. We look forward to the findings of its final report on the events in Douma and its account of several additional incidents that have been reported regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. We would also like to highlight the progress made by the OPCW in terms of logistical planning for the effective implementation of the decision adopted on 27 June at the special session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We consider it of the utmost importance that investigations enable the OPCW to identify the perpetrators of those barbaric acts. We stress that identifying those resposible and conducting fair trials that lead to punishing those responsible will enable justice to be rendered to the victims, while also effectively discourage the repetition of those atrocious crimes and safeguard the non-proliferation regime. That also means restoring the rule of law, which is required to build sustainable peace, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): As this is the first time this month that I take the floor in the Chamber, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank the Plurinational State of Bolivia for its efforts and work during its presidency in October. I would like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing and for submitting to the Council the latest report (S/2018/971, annex) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on chemical weapons in Syria. Since the Polish position on chemical weapons is well-known, I would like to make my remarks brief.

The sixty-first report of the OPCW does not provide information that would allow us to state that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the decision of the OPCW Executive Council. We call on Syria to cooperate fully with the OPCW in order to clarify all existing gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies.

We continuously express our support for the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Fact-finding Mission in their dedication and professional efforts to maintain and strengthen the effectiveness and integrity of the Chemical Weapons

Convention. We are concerned by the reports of the Fact-finding Mission on the use of chemical agents as weapons in Saraqib, Ltamenah and Douma. Poland strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons everywhere, including in Syria. We are of the view that the perpetrators of those crimes must be brought to justice. In conclusion, I support all efforts to enhance the integrity and efficiency of the OPCW. At the same time, I would also like to echo other speakers and emphasize the need for the resumption of the political process in Syria.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for the information she provided today.

We once again highlight the destruction of the 27 chemical-weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic and encourage it to continue to submit reports regarding such facilities. We also encourage the Syrian Government to continue to cooperate in order to clarify outstanding issues for the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We stress that dialogue and transparency are the best paths to overcome any doubt or discrepancy that the OPCW Technical Secretariat encounters. We reiterate our support for the work being carried out by the Technical Secretariat. We encourage Syria and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to continue to work concertedly.

We also consider it essential that the Technical Secretariat conduct on-site inspections in order to gather reliable information from those places where chemical elements or agents are alleged to have been used. In that regard, we highlight the upcoming inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre. We will examine the results closely.

Bolivia categorically rejects the use of chemical weapons; it is an unjustifiable and criminal act regardless of where or by whom it is committed, as it is a serious crime against international law and life itself. Anyone who uses that type of weapon must be accountable to justice. To that end, we insist that the Security Council remain united in order to establish an impartial and credible mechanism to conduct an investigation that is conclusive, transparent and depoliticized to bring those responsible to justice. In that regard, we regret that other multilateral bodies such as the OPCW — whose technical work carried out to date we recognize and support — have been resorted to and given powers. However, we believe that the identification of those responsible should be undertaken by a mechanism that has the backing of the Council. With regard to the technical work of the OPCW, we will closely examine the results of any of the analyses and investigations that the Fact-finding Mission carries out on the alleged incidents in Douma and those reported in 2017.

Finally, we reiterate that the only way out of the conflict is through a high-level political dialogue that, within the framework of international law and, in particular, respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, allows for the formation of a constitutional committee, in accordance with the Sochi declaration, resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process under the auspices of the United Nations. We also highlight the latest agreement between Russia and Turkey, which has enabled a reduction of violence, mainly in the province of Idlib, as well as the meeting among Russia, Turkey, France and Germany. Those platforms for dialogue are essential if we want to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): My delegation thanks the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her informative briefing and the professional work of her able team.

Despite the willingness of and some actions between the key parties aimed at eliminating all remaining ambiguities, we are still not able to see tangible progress on outstanding issues. My delegation believes that the Council should focus more on the following three factors. First is assistance and support to enhance cooperation and collaboration between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Syrian Government. It would help to move forward effectively on the resolution of all disputes concerning the initial declaration by the latter. The second factor concerns facilitating the effective investigation of all reported chemical weapons incidents in Syria. Every month, we hear only that the investigations with regard to Douma and other incidents are continuing. We do not see how the procedures are being carried out or what the problems and obstacles being faced are and how they are being addressed and solved. The third element is the existence of impunity and the absence of preventive measures, which are further stumbling blocks that prevent us from effectively countering the

continued threats of the use of chemical weapons. My country is firmly convinced that the Council must be united in tirelessly seeking a comprehensive solution to the issues of attribution and prosecution without transferring such prerogatives to other structures.

With regard to the decision of the fourth special session of the Conference of the States Parties, Kazakhstan advocates that the possible new functions of the OPCW, as well as the possibilities of expanding its mandate, should be considered and implemented with the participation and support of all States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

To conclude, we hope that the Security Council will retain its leading role and special prerogative in resolving all such issues without transferring them to other structures. To do so would be to subject the issues to further risks of politicization and polarization.

Finally, Kazakhstan calls for the much-needed constructive and patient consultations and the tireless search for mutually acceptable solutions for the benefit of the people of Syria.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Since this is the first meeting for me personally this month, let me also congratulate you, Mr. President, and your team on your presidency and to thank Bolivia for its very active presidency last month.

During the conflict in Syria, we have witnessed the repeated use of chemical weapons as well as numerous other systematic and flagrant violations of international law by the parties to the conflict. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism concluded that the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant were responsible for using chemical weapons. We condemn that in the strongest terms. It is a serious violation of international law and it constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Such use in armed conflict amounts to a war crime.

The proliferation and use of chemical weapons must end and those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable. We have repeatedly stated in the Security Council that impunity is not an option. As representatives know, to that end, we have worked tirelessly, including with the other elected members, to find an agreement on a mechanism for accountability. That is also why we joined the French-led International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons and why we supported the decision of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention at its special session to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. While a mechanism established by the Council would have been and remains preferable, the issue is too important to be allowed to be blocked indefinitely. However, the decision of the Conference of States Parties does not relieve the Council of its responsibility. We now look forward to updates to the Council on the implementation of that decision as part of the monthly reporting under resolution 2118 (2013).

Let me make the following comments with regard to the most recent report on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria by the Director-General of the OPCW (S/2018/971, annex).

First, we note that the Declaration Assessment Team of the OPCW is analysing the response by the Syrian authorities to the questions regarding the outstanding issues related to its chemical weapons declaration. We emphasize that all open issues must be closed as soon as possible. All remaining chemical weapons must be declared and destroyed, in line with resolution 2118 (2013). We urge the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully and actively with the OPCW so that the accuracy and completeness of its declaration can ultimately be verified.

Secondly, we reiterate our full support for the OPCW and our complete confidence in the independent, impartial and professional work of its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We look forward to the upcoming reports regarding a number of pending investigations, including the final report on the alleged attack in Douma.

Thirdly, we remain deeply concerned about allegations that chemical weapons may be used again. In that regard, we fully support and endorse the remarks made by the Secretary-General in his letter transmitting the monthly report where it states "that any further possible use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic would be wholly unacceptable" (*S/2018/971*). All parties must be reminded of the clear and absolute prohibition on the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances.

As co-penholder on humanitarian matters in Syria, I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight and welcome the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Rukban, which took place this weekend. We want to

recognize the tremendous efforts by the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to make that happen, as well as the facilitation by Russia and the United States. It is critically needed relief for the approximately 50,000 people who are stranded in the camp and who have not received aid since January. However, we need more positive examples like this as we continue to push for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need throughout Syria.

In the same vein, let me also take this opportunity to comment on the most recent developments on the political track. The recent meetings in relevant formats show that there is an international momentum that now needs to be seized solution, aiming to have the constitutional committee in place before the end of the year. At this critical time the Council needs to take a clear stand, show that we fully support the United Nations-led political process and make sure that there is some real progress in time for the Special Envoy's briefing later this month.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

We appreciate the continued efforts by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Government on its chemical weapons programme. However, we understand from the report of the Director-General of OPCW that the Secretariat remains unable to resolve all the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies.

In that regard, we note that the Director-General has sent a letter to the Syrian Government emphasizing the importance of resolving the outstanding issues on an expedited basis.

We would like to once again stress the importance of meaningful and results-oriented communications and continued consultations between the OPCW and the Syrian Government with the clear objective of addressing all remaining outstanding issues once and for all. Meanwhile, we note the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) has continued its investigation with regard to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma in April. All parties should cooperate with the FFM in its ongoing investigation. We look forward to the issuance of its final report on that incident.

We also note that the FFM has continued to collect and analyse information related to five incidents of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Our position remains consistent and clear, namely, that any use of chemical weapons in Syria by any actor under any circumstance is totally unacceptable.

As the Secretary-General stressed in his letter dated 29 October, "it is imperative that no impunity for those acts be permitted by the international community" (*S/2018/971*) In that regard, we remain convinced that restoring the unity of the Council is the most sensible way forward to make tangible progress towards ensuring accountability.

Finally, we would like to underscore the importance of resuming political dialogue in order to sustainably address the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

I will focus on three points: first, our support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); secondly, accountability; and thirdly, political developments.

First, I will address our support for the OPCW and the establishment of the attribution mechanism. We thank the Secretary-General for the sixty-first OPCW report (S/2018/971, annex), and we support the objective and professional work of OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

It remains unacceptable that, almost five years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, its declaration can still not be verified as accurate and complete. The Kingdom of the Netherlands reiterates the importance of the outcome of the fourth special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 27 June. An overwhelming majority of member States reconfirmed and strengthened the standard against the use of chemical weapons by deciding on the establishment of an attribution mechanism. The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore praises the Director-General of the OPCW for his commitment to implementing that decision expeditiously.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands expresses great concern about the obstructive attitude of the Russian Federation during the recent budget discussions in the OPCW. By frustrating the discussions on the OPCW budget for 2019, the Russian Federation is trying to

delay the legitimate establishment of the attribution mechanism. It also puts the overall functioning of the OPCW at risk. We call on the Russian Federation to engage constructively and to demonstrate support for the solemn purpose of the OPCW — and that purpose is to eradicate chemical weapons worldwide under a United Nations mandate.

Secondly, I turn to the need for accountability. Syrians deserve justice. Impunity for chemical weapons use cannot be allowed. Accountability for chemical weapons used in Syria is neither optional nor negotiable. The use of chemical weapons is never permitted by anyone under any circumstance. Therefore, upholding the international non-proliferation regime is crucial. That norm has been endangered by the Syrian regime. We look forward to the final report on the attack in Douma on 7 April to be published before the end of the year.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The possibility for the OPCW to share information with the Mechanism can make an important contribution to combating impunity in Syria. It is therefore an important first step towards accountability. We remain convinced that a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) is by far the best option. It is the best way to achieve accountability for the most serious crimes that have taken place in Syria. As long as the Council is prevented from referring the situation in Syria to the ICC, we will continue our efforts for accountability elsewhere — in the OPCW, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, the commission of inquiry and the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

We emphasize that the archiving for the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism Joint Investigative Mechanism's is done on the basis of the applicable United Nations rules and procedures, as Ms. Nakamitsu shared with us during a previous meeting on chemical weapons in Syria (see S/PV.8174). A letter from the Office for Disarmament Affairs or the Secretary-General has no added value, and for that reason we cannot support the Russian request for a letter.

Thirdly, I will speak on political developments. We welcome the reduced level of violence in Idlib after the Turkish-Russian memorandum of understanding. We are concerned, however, by the recent statement of the Syrian representative here in the Council that "[we will] fully recover Idlib when we deem it necessary" (*S/PV.8383, p. 15*). An escalation of violence in Idlib by the regime would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. It would reconfirm that the regime in no way prioritizes protecting the Syrian people. Citizens in Idlib deserve protection. A military confrontation will undermine lasting stability and peace.

We call on Turkey and Russia to involve the United Nations in the implementation of the humanitarian side of the memorandum of understanding. We must not allow ourselves to miss the window of opportunity offered by the situation in Idlib for the actual convening of the constitutional committee. It should be used as the starting point of a broader, sustainable political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). The Kingdom of the Netherlands pleads for the convening of the constitutional committee as soon as possible, before the end of the year and before the departure of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. We call on all parties, particularly the Syrian regime, to cooperate constructively with the United Nations to prevent further delays in the political process.

In conclusion, with reference to the statement delivered earlier by our Russian colleague on the White Helmets, we reconfirm our point of view that the White Helmets are brave humanitarian workers. They have been attacked on the ground by the Syrian regime while engaging in purely humanitarian efforts, and those attacks are unacceptable.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

At the outset, I would like to thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. I have taken note of the report of the Organization on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (S/2018/971, annex), transmitted recently to the Security Council by the Secretary-General. The OPCW has continued to engage with Syria on unresolved issues concerning the initial declaration of chemical weapons.

China supports enhanced coordination between the two sides for a proper settlement of the issues at hand. We have taken note that the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is investigating five cases of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, and hope to see conclusions from the investigation at an early date. Meanwhile, all parties hope that the Mission will produce the final investigation report on the use of chemical weapons in the Douma area. We hope that the mission Will carry out its work in strict compliance with its mandate.

China's position on chemical weapons is consistent and clear. We are firmly against the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual, under any circumstances and for any purpose. The use of chemical weapons is not to be tolerated whenever or wherever it occurs. All alleged chemical weapons incidents must undergo comprehensive, objective and impartial investigations so as to draw conclusions, based on well-established evidence, that can withstand the test of facts and history and to bring to justice the perpetrators and parties responsible.

With regard to the adoption of the position on accountability for the use of chemical weapons at the fourth special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in June, China's position remains unchanged. We hope that the parties will work to bridge their differences through dialogue and consultations, and together cope with the threat posed by the use of chemical weapons.

Finally, I want to underscore that the issue of chemical weapons in Syria is closely related to the political settlement of the Syrian question. At present, the parties to the Syrian question are engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts to advance the Syrian political process. We call on all parties concerned to take a constructive approach, maintain unity on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, resolve problems through dialogue and consultations and work together to prevent the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons. In that process, the parties should strictly abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We hope that the parties will work together constructively for an early comprehensive, just and proper settlement of the Syrian question.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate to you, Mr. President, on presiding over the proceedings of the Security Council this month. I hope that the Council will be able to benefit from the Chinese wisdom during your presidency.

I should like to begin by providing information to raise awareness among members of the Security Council. There is a Syrian terrorist named Jihad Diab. He is also known by the name of Abu Wa'el Diab. That terrorist travelled to Afghanistan in 2000 to fight alongside Al-Qaida. Pakistani security forces arrested him in 2001, along with other international terrorists. Pakistani security forces handed them over to United States intelligence services, which transferred them to the Guantánamo Bay detention camp.

It turns out that the American authorities have released a number of Guantánamo prisoners during the terrorist crisis that has been plaguing my country. Miraculously, those prisoners were able to leave Guantánamo and travel to my country. They obtained passports, visas and money. They travelled tens of thousands of kilometres without being stopped by anyone, managing to go from Guantánamo all the way to Syria. Among those individuals was Jihad Diab, who is currently residing in Turkey. He is visiting his mother, who is sick, in one of the hospitals there. He can move freely between Syria and Turkey to fight alongside the Al-Nusra Front, a terrorist entity that has been inscribed on the Council's lists. That is the first part of what I wanted to share with the Council today.

The second part deals with the details, and I trust that it will be of interest to the Council. The American Government reached an agreement with the Uruguayan Government in 2014. Pursuant to that agreement, a large number of terrorists from Guantánamo prison were transferred to Uruguay for so-called humanitarian reasons. That number included three Syrians, one Palestinian and one Tunisian. Jihad Diab was one of them. For humanitarian reasons, therefore, he was able to go from Guantánamo to Syria through Uruguay. The United States has stated that it reached an agreement with the Government of Uruguay, pursuant to which the Government of Uruguay committed to keeping that terrorist on its soil. However, that terrorist left Uruguay and went to Syria. Now residing in Turkey, he is

recruiting terrorists and sending them to Syria — either to Idlib or elsewhere in the country. We will relay that information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015). We expect that the Committee will deliver a practical response this time by inscribing the name of that terrorist on the sanctions list — of course, if there is anyone who genuinely wants to tackle the heinous scourge of terrorism that has been plaguing my country.

I will tell the Council of another incident, which happened in 2014. We informed the Council about it in an official letter that was issued as document S/2014/195. I concerns another Syrian terrorist, named Haytham Qassab. That man transferred chemical material from Turkey to the so-called Ahrar al-Sham, which is the Al-Nusra Front, now located in Idlib. On 31 May, Turkish authorities released that terrorist after having caught him in the act and in possession of chemical material on Turkish soil. He was released to be able to play his terrorist role in Syria. That terrorist, Haytham Qassab, went to a Turkish supplier named Khalid Osman Malika, head of the Thurwa Import and Export Company in Turkey, which operates in the Polhajili area of Turkey. We can even describe the colour of the building's façade and give the building's address. Haytham Qassab requested material from that Turkish supplier, including white phosphorus, red phosphorus, potassium fluoride, methanol and resorcinol. He said that he needed those materials to produce white smoke in certain areas and then claim that it was the Syrian authorities that had bombarded those areas. The objective therefore was to use those materials as chemical weapons. That is the information I wished to provide concerning the terrorism from which my country has been suffering — terrorism supported by certain States.

Day after day, the practices of certain Western States on the Council demonstrate that they have come to enjoy exploiting the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules governing the proceedings of the Organization. Those States have also manipulated United Nations platforms to advance their political agendas, with the aim of interfering in the affairs of other Member States, as well as to cover up for the crimes that they themselves perpetrated against the Syrian people, and also to cover up the crimes perpetrated by the armed terrorist groups to which they have provided myriad forms of support over the past seven years. That includes facilitating the acquisition by those terrorist groups of toxic chemical materials that they then used against the Syrian army and Syrian civilians alike.

Day after day, light is shed on unprecedented atrocities perpetrated against the Syrian people due to the heinous policies carried out by the Governments of those States. The most recent example is the discovery of mass graves in Raqqa several days ago. That was a consequence of the air strikes by the so-called global coalition against that city. The tragic discovery of those mass graves in Raqqa revealed 4,000 bodies, most of whom were women, children and the elderly. We had removed only 2 per cent of the rubble in Raqqa and already discovered 4,000 bodies to date in mass graves. That tragic discovery corroborates the veracity of the information we provided repeatedly with respect to the brutality of the crimes perpetrated by the coalition. The coalition completely destroyed the Syrian city of Raqqa — after having transferred Da'esh terrorists to the governorate of Deir ez-Zour — to prevent the national army from controlling the shared borders with Iraq, and to ensure that they could deliver on their plans to undermine the sovereignty and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic in conjunction with the militias under their wing.

Once again, my country calls upon the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities to safeguard international peace and security, to act immediately to put an end to the crimes perpetrated by the global coalition against the Syrian people, to prevent the reoccurrence of those crimes and to hold the perpetrators of those crimes against my people accountable. My country calls upon the Security Council to conduct an international investigation into the crimes and mass killings that were uncovered in the city of Raqqa. We call upon the Council once again to put an end to the aggressive and illegal presence of American forces and other foreign forces on Syrian soil.

I would like to tell those who have a short memory that Syria's commitment to eradicating weapons of mass destruction does not date back to 2013 alone, rather 2013 was the year we joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. On the contrary, our commitment to eradicating weapons of mass destruction is a long-standing one. I would like to remind all present in the Council that my country presented, on 27 December 2003 to be exact, when we were a member of the Security Council, an initiative to make the Middle East

a zone free of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Nonetheless, at that time the United States delegation threatened to veto it if we put that proposal to the vote in Security Council. Therefore, our commitment is long-standing and dates back to 2003. In that regard, my country reiterates the call for Member States to make the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction. We also calls upon the Council to urge Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear-weapon State and to submit all of its nuclear activities and facilities to the monitoring of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

My country has honoured its commitments pursuant to the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Syria has always endeavoured to cooperate in a positive, transparent and flexible way to uphold its commitments, even as we face tremendous challenges and difficult, complicated and provocative security conditions resulting from the hostile actions of some regional and international stakeholders.

The Syrian Government made an unprecedented achievement in the Organization's history by irreversibly eliminating its chemical-weapons programme in record time and on United States vessels. Yet instead of commending what the Syrian Government has done, we observe that those States that are manipulating international law, those that are masters of the art of deception, are calling on the Security Council to hold theatrical meetings on an almost daily basis, with the sole aim of advancing provocative and unfounded allegations against the Syrian Government. I would underscore for those States once again that there is a huge, rampaging elephant in the Chamber. The elephant is the States that called for today's meeting are the same States that facilitated terrorist groups' acquisition of toxic chemical materials. The elephant is that those armed terrorist groups used that material against Syria. The elephant is the statements of senior officials of those States, accompanied by the statements we have all heard today, that the only way to save the armed terrorist groups is through the use of chemical weapons. Hence there are States in this Chamber that want to see chemical weapons used, and States that are prompting terrorist groups to use those weapons to once again hold such theatrical meetings and make unfounded accusations against the Syrian Government and say that the Syrian Government used those heinous weapons.

I now take this opportunity to note that these heinous weapons are European and American weapons. American weapons in Viet Nam and European weapons in the hands of France and Germany, as was mentioned by my colleague the representative of France, who mentioned that at the beginning of his statement this morning. Therefore, the use of chemical weapons is indeed a Western use.

One day I visited Hanoi on a Vietnamese aircraft. I travelled from Saigon to Hanoi. From the window of my aeroplane I saw thousands of giant craters in the ground between Saigon and Hanoi. When I asked, "What are those craters there?" I was told that they were craters left by the dropping of American chemical bombs, which incinerated all signs of life over a 1,000 kilometres between Saigon and Hanoi. I repeat, thousands of craters.

The elephant is that those statements are direct incitement for armed terrorist groups to use toxic chemical weapons against civilians in Idlib and for them to fabricate evidence and seek false witnesses to manipulate the crime scene. These States, with their media and political influence, stand ready to accuse the Syrian Government and intervene to save terrorist groups, and that is exactly what happened in Khan Al-Assal and Khan Shaykhoun.

The elephant is the scenes orchestrated by the White Helmets, which are the deceptive British branch of the Al-Nusra Front, about the alleged use of toxic chemical weapons in a number of Syrian areas. The elephant is that the fact-finding mission has continuously violated its mandate and failed to uphold professional standards. It has adopted a selective approach in its investigations. It has not been transparent or maintained the chain of custody of its samples. It did not comply with the fair geographical composition of its teams. That, I would say to Ms. Nakamitsu, is the truth.

The elephant is the use by the global coalition of white phosphorus, an internationally banned chemical agent that has bee unsed repeatedly against Syrian civilians.

The elephant is that these States are turning a blind eye to more than 160 letters that my Government addressed to the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), as well as the Counter-Terrorism Committee, concerning

the possession and use by armed terrorist groups of chemical and toxic materials.

The elephant is that the Security Council has not taken any measure to address those States that sponsor and finance the armed terrorist groups, those States that have facilitated the possession of toxic and chemical weapons for those groups.

In our most recent letter, we informed the Security Council about a tremendous explosion on Thursday, 18 October, in a part of a factory with a large amount of fertilizer, explosive material and barrels of liquid chlorine, a factory that belongs to an armed terrorist group in Idlib, specifically in the city of Termanin, which is 15 kilometres from the Turkish border. That factory is supervised by foreign Turks, British and Chechen experts. The explosion took the lives of nine of the so-called experts and two of the so-called White Helmets. We remind the Council that some Al-Nusra Front agents have previously transferred cargo from that factory to an unknown destination, in conjunction with the terrorist White Helmets.

With regard to the settlement of the so-called unresolved issues that have to do with Syria's first declaration, my country is of the view that a great deal of effort and time was spent on certain aspects of the declaration, which continues to be described as unresolved issues and yet they were widely considered and studied. My country believes that it is important to reconsider the composition of the current Declaration Assessment Team. It is important to introduce changes to the Team and incorporate scientific and technical expertise, rather than intelligence elements. It is important to let go of one-sided interpretations and to stop turning a blind eye to the interpretations of Syrian experts.

My Government calls the Council's attention to the fact that the nature of the work of the Declaration Assessment Team has changed. It was an assistance team and it has become an investigation team. That runs counter to the provisions of the agreement. Therefore, all the issues that were discussed remain unjustifiably pending, even though Syria has collaborated with the Declaration Assessment Team in general and has provided the it with all the information at its disposal. Syria has also responded effectively and without delay to the questions and inquiries submitted to it.

In conclusion, my country's Government has underscored time and time again before the Council and the OCPW Executive Council that it condemns any use of any type of chemical weapon or other weapon of mass destruction, as that constitutes a crime against humanity and a wrongful, immoral and unjustifiable act, no matter the circumstances, whereabouts or cause.

From this Chamber, we reaffirm that the Syrian army has never used any chemical weapons. We no longer possess those weapons, as Ms. Sigrid Kaag reported few years ago. We remind the Council that the Syrian chemical-weapon arsenal was completely destroyed in the Mediterranean aboard the American vessel *MV Cape Ray*. That was attested to by Ms. Kaag as well in her report submitted to the Council in June 2014.

This case, therefore, was closed four years ago, but there are some who do not want it closed. They want to continue to defame the Syrian Government every month during these theatrical meetings; indeed, these meetings are purely theatrical. A lot of effort and money here and at The Hague are spent while this file is essentially empty.

The Syrian Government confirms that it will continue to uphold all the commitments it undertook upon acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as its commitment to fight terrorism, which will not be stopped by any form of political or media blackmailing, or even by the despicable exploitation of the blood of our innocent people in Syria.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.